my enemy's invisible i don't know how to fight by blenderfullasarcasm

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Summary: "Steve," Jonathan says calmly, like he can't practically hear Steve's heart beating against his rib cage, about ready to burst out of his chest, through the phone line. "Steve, you're going to have to leave your room if you want to find out what it is." (Spooktober Day 11: Creaking Stairs at 3 am / impaled) [Pre-OT3]

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It's three in the morning when Steve's eyes snap open.

He knows the exact time - seven past three - because of his new clock with the red light-up numbers that he'd bought for himself after he'd accidentally bashed the old one to pieces.

(He'd dreamt he was back in the tunnels, that he hadn't gotten out in time, that he was being *devoured* alive, and then the alarm had gone off and - yeah, it was in pieces in the backyard, now.)

He doesn't realize what's woken him up until it happens again.

There's a creaking sound, and it's coming from the stairs.

Fuck.

Steve double-checks his mental calendar. His parents aren't home, and shouldn't be for a couple of months. There's no special day coming up anytime soon that they'd want to surprise him on or anything, so they're not about to turn up unexpectedly.

So.

What's making the noise?

Steve fumbles for the phone on his bedside table, almost dropping it in his haste to dial the first number he can think of.

It rings once, twice, three times, and with every ring Steve can feel

his shoulders getting more and more tense. He pulls his sheets up from where they've been shoved at the foot of the bed to cover his shoulders, and he eyes his door warily.

On the sixth ring, someone picks up.

"H-hello?" the person yawns, and apparently Steve's memorized Jonathan Byers' phone number sometime in the past year. If he's being honest with himself, it's probably from giving Dustin and the gang rides to the arcade and back. Steve always calls the kids' parents from the payphone if they ask him to, and Mrs. Byers *always* asks. He doesn't blame her, because, seriously, she and her family have been through a *lot.*

"Oh-thank-god-Jonathan-help-me." It rushes out of Steve in one breath, and he can't stop his voice from trembling a little at the end.

"I - what, ***Steve?"*** Steve's a little offended by the way that Jonathan says his name, like he can't believe that Steve, of all people, would be calling him at...three twenty in the morning. Which, honestly, neither can Steve, really, but he's rolling with it.

Steve shakes his head to clear it. "I - Look, I promise this isn't a prank call, please don't hang up on me, there's something in my house," he says quickly, in one breath.

A shadow runs through the light leaking through the crack beneath his door, and Steve bites back a yelp, cringing away from it like that'll stop it from trying to murder him.

There's a long, *long* moment of silence, and Steve bites his lip, staring hard and unblinkingly at the door until Jonathan finally says something.

"Why do you say 'something'? Instead of someone?"

Steve feels a mountain of tension drop from his shoulders and he laughs shakily. "I'm the only one in the house."

"Wait - what about your parents?"

"You think my parents are home? That's cute, Jonathan." Steve was

never going to let his mouth run ahead of his brain again, holy shit.

Anyway.

They.

Don't have time to unpack that right this second, and denial is his friend.

Denial is apparently also Jonathan's friend, or maybe he just didn't hear Steve say...that, because he just asks, *"Why didn't you call Nancy? You know she's better at - "*

"We just broke up, man - it'd be weird."

There's a pregnant pause.

*"And it's **not**weird to call her new **boyfriend**?"*

...Steve is starting to regret calling. "Look, I wasn't exactly - are you going to help me or not?" he asks, and he can feel his breathing speeding up to dangerous speeds. If he keeps this up, he'll probably pass out before whatever fucking monster is out there can eat him - and, actually he'd be *fine* with that.

Steve can just barely hear Jonathan sigh deeply on the other end of the phone. *"Yeah, okay,"* he says, and suddenly Steve can breathe again. Cool, cool. Air is good.

He takes a couple more deep breaths, relishing the feeling, before Jonathan finally mutters, " *So you said there's something in your house…?"*

He's trailing off the same way that Nancy does when she's thinking, and Steve is sure that he's picked it up from her, He can almost imagine the little furrow in his brow - *her* brow, that is.

Or, well, both, actually.

"I - yeah. There's no one in the house but me - my parents aren't home, no guests, no siblings, etc, so there's no one it could possibly be. Really hoping it's not another Demigorgon," he joked, like

running from carnivorous beast is something they do everyday for fun.

The everyday part is disturbingly accurate, actually.

Not so much the fun part, though.

*"How do you know it's **in** your house?"* Jonathan asks, calmly, and thank God because Steve is physically incapable of being calm right now.

"I - the stairs, they creaked, and there's this - uh, shadow that ran past the door." Steve peeks back towards the door and - "There it is again, shit - "

"Can you tell how big it is?" Jonathan asks, and Steve really has no idea how he can sound so put-together when his girlfriend's ex is practically hyperventilating in his ear.

His brain tells him to make a *that's what she said* joke but now is NOT the time, brain, shut the hell up. Steve forces himself to pull himself... *mildly* together. "I - the stairs creaking was - uh, it was pretty soft?" he stutters, trying to think. "Before...last year, I probably wouldn't have woken up."

Jonathan ignores his faltering speech, instead just saying, *"Okay - that means that it's probably smaller than you. That's good.* "

"Yeah," Steve agrees. "Maybe it's just a rat or something." He can be optimistic. Sure. Why not.

"...Sure," says Jonathan, after a lengthy pause that Steve staunchly ignores. *"Have you got something you can use to defend yourself with if it isn't?"*

Of course he does.

He lives in *Hawkins.*

"I mean, I have my bat under my bed. It has a bunch of nails and shit in it."

"...Why." It's not a question. Steve is a little insulted.

Like, *really?*

Steve reaches down under his bed and rummages around for a minute before pulling out his trusty nail-filled baseball bat. He feels a little bit safer, now that he has something in his hand that he can use to defend himself. Which, really, just answered Jonathan's question.

"Why the hell do you think?"

"Sorry, dumb question." At least Jonathan sounds a little sheepish. Steve is magnanimous enough to forgive him, and not just because he's possibly the only thing between Steve and breathing so fast that he passes out. *"You used it for that time Billy was possessed by the Mindslayer, right?"*

Steve pauses, breathing slowing a little as he process that information. "Oh, is *that* why we were going to kill him?"

*"Wh - what, you didn't **know**?"* Jonathan sounds a little incredulous, and, well Steve can't really blame him. In hindsight, it was kind of obvious, but at the time it hadn't really been something he was focusing on processing at the time, okay, and then it had been over and he'd started repressing the whole experience as much as he could because he *would like* to live a relatively normal life.

The shadow passes through the splinter of light under his door again, and Steve gulps, stuttering, "I - no, I just thought he was a racist asshole and we were doing the world a favor - look, this is *really* not the time, please, Jonathan - "

"Steve," Jonathan says. " ***Breathe.***"

Steve breathes.

It's still maybe a little too quick, maybe it's stuttering a little, but he tries his best to match Jonathan's breathing pattern, even though he can barely hear it over the sound of his blood rushing through his ears. His new clock doesn't tick, so that's the only indication of time passing that he has while still keeping his eyes fixed to the door, muscles tensing and ready to attack anything that comes through.

"Steve," Jonathan says calmly, like he can't practically hear Steve's heart beating against his ribcage, about ready to burst out of his chest, through the phone line. " *Steve, you're going to have to leave your room if you want to find out what it is."*

Steve is indeed aware of this.

That doesn't mean that he's *happy* about it.

...Shit.

Steve realizes about halfway to the door that the phone cord won't quite reach it, much less the staircase outside. He curses quietly under his breath. This would be a *great* time to have one of those fancy Star Trek communicators, but it's not like those are actually *possible.*

Maybe he should look into getting himself a walkie talkie or something…

"What is it?" Jonathan asks, voice only slightly tense.

"Nothing, nothing," Steve replies, tightening his grip around his baseball bat. His knuckles are practically white at this point. He clears his throat awkwardly. "Just - the phone cord won't reach the hallway."

There's a moment of silence as Jonathan processes that.

"Well, shit," he says, succinctly, and Steve really couldn't have said it better himself. *"You'll have to hang up, then."*

Steve flinches violently at the thought, bat knocking against his knee. "I - *no,* " he says forcefully, then backtracks because that maybe came out a little harsh and he *really* doesn't want Jonathan to hang up. "I - look, there's another phone on the - um, in the hallway downstairs, so if I can just - just get down there - "

"Okay," Jonathan breaks in, luckily saving Steve from figuring out where he was trying to go with that sentence. *"So you'll have to run for it. Assuming…"*

He hesitates, and Steve nearly bites straight through his own lip. "Assuming *what?* " he demands tersely.

Jonathan takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. *"Assuming that it isn't right outside your door, waiting,"* he says quietly, and Steve regrets asking.

"Maybe it won't be." Steve tries to say it with a little optimism, but it falls flat. He clears his throat. "Okay, well. No time like the present, I guess. Talk to you in either two minutes or never again."

"Talk to you soon, Steve," Jonathan says, like the other option doesn't even exist. *"Otherwise, Nancy will kick **both** our asses."*

Steve chokes back a laugh, then takes a deep breath, setting the phone on his bed and creeping towards the door, trying to keep his footsteps as light as possible.

There's nothing outside his doorway when he opens the door barely an inch and peers through, so he breathes a silent sigh of relief then listens as closely as he can to his surroundings.

...Nothing except for his own stifled breathing. Great.

He reluctantly closes his eyes, trying to sharpen his hearing. He subconsciously grips his bat tighter and it creaks in his hands.

Still nothing. Except maybe a soft scratching coming from the kitchen…? But that could be his imagination.

... *hopefully* it's just his imagination.

Steve takes another deep, slow, quiet breath to prepare himself, then hopes to God that there's nothing on the stairs because he can't quite see down them from this angle and fucking *sprints* down them, brandishing the bat with one arm while the other covers his head.

He doesn't hit anything on the way down, which is a good sign, because he can't actually see anything through the arm protecting his face.

Steve fumbles the phone off the hook in the hall as he runs past it,

straight into the living room with all its plastic-covered furniture and plasters his back to the wall, breathing heavily. "J-Jonathan, you still there?"

"Steve. Good. You're not dead." Jonathan's voice sounds a little breathless, maybe, but Steve can hardly hear him over the sound of his heart pounding in his chest so he can't really tell for certain.

And, besides, does it really matter when he has a potential demigorgon - or, god forbid, something *worse* - in his house?

So he shoves that into a box in the back of his mind to deal with later. The box is starting to overflow - he should really try to deal with that soon. He thinks he can see that time he tried on his Mom's heels in first grade.

"Nope!" he says, voice strangled as his eyes dart around the room, latching onto anything that looks like it could be moving in the wavering moonlight. For once, he thanks his parents for being such neat freaks. He's sure this would be a lot more hazardous to his health if they hadn't.

There's nothing there.

...Or is there?

No one fucking knows, least of all Steve.

He thinks he sees something move by the fireplace, so immediately his brain decides throwing his baseball bat at it is a great idea.

It makes a loud crashing sound, and Steve winces internally. Of course there isn't anything threatening there. It was one of the plastic covers, fluttering in the stagnant air inside.

He takes a few steps closer, just in case he's somehow wrong, and his baseball bat is only *just* out of his reach -

And then he hears a scratch on the wood behind him.

Steve grabs the poker from where it's resting beside the fireplace - it's closer than his bat even though it only has the one pointy end - and

in one quick movement, whirls around to fucking *impale* whatever fresh new monster has clawed its way out of hell -

Which is a cat, apparently.

What the hell.

"Steve?" Jonathan asks hesitantly, and Steve can barely hear him over the blood rushing through his ears.

Is it -

Is it an *evil* cat?

An evil *Russian* cat?

It looks normal enough - a tabby with yellow eyes, completely unbothered by Steve brandishing a poker at it - but, like, it's not like he can be *positive* it's not...working for the Russians, or something.

Stranger things have happened, okay.

"It's...a cat?"

"You don't sound too sure about that."

"Well, yeah, because the last time Dustin picked up a lizard *it tried to kill us."*

There's a sharp intake of breath on the other end of the line, and Steve feels vindicated.

"A fair point," Jonathan allows, voice strained. *"Do you have any nougat?"*

Steve almost chokes on his laugh, because since when is Jonathan Byers *funny?*

He eyes the probably-cat warily. It ignores him, licking its paw instead.

Then, he decides then and there to go through with what was possibly the stupidest idea he'd ever had.

Steve reaches down and gently rubs its head.

The cat eyes him for a long moment, then goes back to washing itself.

Steve is suddenly capable of breathing again, though he hadn't realized he had stopped. "Okay, I'm about ninety percent sure it's just a cat."

"Good. Good. That's - " Jonathan yawns, cutting himself off.

Steve grins. " - good?" he offers.

He can almost picture Johnathan rolling his eyes.

Instead of focusing on that, though, he crouches down to get a better angle. The cat seems to appreciate that, nuzzling at his fingers, a purr resounding deep in its chest. Steve cracks a small smile.

Then his mouth is moving, yet again, without his permission.

"Can you...not tell your brother about this?"

There's another pause, this one slightly confused. It was strange how much they communicated through silences, despite mostly knowing each other by proxy. *"My brother? I would have thought - ?"*

Steve snorts, knowing where this is going. "Please. Nancy already knows how much of a loser I am. Dustin and the others still think I'm a cool guy, somehow, even though I spend most of my time babysitting them, and I'd kinda like to keep it that way."

"...Yeah, okay." Jonathan hesitates. *"...It's really just a cat?"*

Steve scratches its head idly. "Well, I mean, it isn't biting my hand off, so I guess so?"

There's a rustle of clothing from the other side of the line - Johnathan shrugging, if Steve had to guess.

Steve skritches idly at the cat's ears, which flick when he gets too close to a small nick in one of them. He's not entirely sure why Johnathan hasn't hung up on him already. But, well, since he hasn't...

"I - um. Thanks, man," Steve says quietly. "For not hanging up on me. I would've deserved it."

Another lengthy pause. It's almost like they need a third person there to keep the conversation going. Except, obviously, three-way phone calls weren't possible on house phones, at least.

"...Nancy and I were going to watch a movie later, while my brother and his friend play Dungeons and Dragons in the basement. If you're going to be driving Dustin anyway, then maybe you could...stick around for a little while…?"

Steve stares down at the cat, which has somehow made its way into his lap, for a long moment.

"...Yeah," he says finally. "I'd like that."

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Notes:

im so tired

let me know if there's anything fishy going on

title from Echo (Circus-P)